

VU Research Portal

Short review of Montana 1911: a professor and his wife among the Blackfeet. Wilhelmina Maria Uhlenbeck-Melchior's diary and C.C. Uhlenbeck's Original Blackfoot texts and A new series of Blackfoot texts . Ed. by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar [Review of: M. Eggermont-Molenaar (2005) Montana 1911: a professor and his wife among the Blackfeet. Wilhelmina Maria Uhlenbeck-Melchior's diary and C.C. Uhlenbeck's Original Blackfoot texts and A new series of Blackfoot texts . Ed. by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar; with contributions by Alice Kehoe, Inge Genée and Klaas van Berkel; transl. from Dutch by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar]

Noordegraaf, J.

published in

Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft
2007

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Noordegraaf, J. (2007). Short review of Montana 1911: a professor and his wife among the Blackfeet. Wilhelmina Maria Uhlenbeck-Melchior's diary and C.C. Uhlenbeck's Original Blackfoot texts and A new series of Blackfoot texts . Ed. by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar [Review of: M. Eggermont-Molenaar (2005) Montana 1911: a professor and his wife among the Blackfeet. Wilhelmina Maria Uhlenbeck-Melchior's diary and C.C. Uhlenbeck's Original Blackfoot texts and A new series of Blackfoot texts . Ed. by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar; with contributions by Alice Kehoe, Inge Genée and Klaas van Berkel; transl. from Dutch by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar]. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*, 16, 322-324.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Kurzrezensionen / Short reviews / Notes de lecture

Montana 1911: a professor and his wife among the Blackfeet. Wilhelmina Maria Uhlenbeck-Melchior's diary and C.C. Uhlenbeck's Original Blackfoot texts and A new series of Blackfoot texts. Ed. by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar; with contributions by Alice Kehoe, Inge Genée and Klaas van Berkel; transl. from Dutch by Mary Eggermont-Molenaar. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press & Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press 2005. XII, 417 pp. [ISBN: 1-552-38114-5 pbk (University of Calgary Press), 0-8032-1828-1 pbk (University of Nebraska Press)]. \$35.00].

Jan Noordegraaf (Amsterdam)

In the summer of 1911, Christianus Cornelius Uhlenbeck (1866-1951), Professor of Old Germanic Languages at Leiden University, travelled to Montana to conduct fieldwork among the southern Piegan Indians. Uhlenbeck had visited the Blackfeet reservation before: during the summer of 1910 he had stayed there together with his student Jan P.B. Josselin de Jong (1886-1964). Accompanying him on his 1911 stay, which took up the full academic summer break, was his wife, Wilhelmina Melchior (1862-1954). It was 'Aunt Willy', as my Leiden teacher, C.C.'s great-nephew E.M. Uhlenbeck (1913-2003), used to call her, who kept a diary of their experiences among the Blackfeet, which appeared in English translation in 2005.

C.C. Uhlenbeck was an Indo-Europeanist by profession, but took an interest in non-Indo-European languages early on in his career. His 1888 doctoral thesis, written in a Neogrammarian vein, dealt with the correspondences between the Germanic and the Balto-Slavic languages. Judging by the propositions that formed part of the defence of his doctoral thesis, it appears that he was also deeply interested in the Basque languages. Indeed, it was not long afterwards, in 1891, that his *Baskische Studiën* ('Basque Studies') rolled from the presses of the Royal Dutch Academy. Around 1900, having criticized the 'scholastic aridity' of the Neogrammarian school, Uhlenbeck came to the definitive conclusion that it was only by comparison with other language groups that a deeper insight into Indo-European could be achieved.¹ It would appear that he regarded the study of Blackfoot as one of the means to achieve that aim. In short, Uhlenbeck developed from a Neogrammarian scholar into a truly Humboldtian linguist and typologist, seeking to demonstrate the 'ethnopsychological' background of grammatical phenomena. In my opinion Uhlenbeck may be incorporated without too much difficulty into what is often referred to as the 'Humboldtian trend in linguistics' (cf. Koerner 1977).

¹ When commemorating his teacher, the celebrated Leiden *mahaguru* J.H.C. Kern, in 1918, Uhlenbeck talked of the 'vanity' of the theory 'that was founded on merely one language family ...', the 'one-sided and soulless theory of the Neogrammarians', who tried to solve the whole world of language through the application of sound laws and analogies. He argued that even their major findings had been arrived at 'in spite of, not by virtue of their methodology'.

Thanks to the efforts of Mary Eggermont and her collaborators, *Montana 1911* has turned out to be a painstakingly produced and amply illustrated book which amounts to much more than just a standard edition of Willy Uhlenbeck's diary. Of course, it is the diary itself (covering the period from 8 June to 17 September 1911) which forms the *pièce de résistance*. It is reproduced here in full (31-178), translated from Dutch into English and enhanced with a number of nostalgic pictures of the reservation and its inhabitants dating from 1910 and 1911. This part of the book is preceded by three introductory studies. One of these, 'The Uhlenbecks and the burdens of life', written by Klaas van Berkel and Mary Eggermont (7-15), provides the reader with indispensable biographical information. The second part of the book, introduced by Inge Genée's informative essay 'A Dutch linguist on the prairies: C.C. Uhlenbeck's work on Blackfoot' (183-193), features a collage of the Blackfoot texts recorded by C.C. Uhlenbeck, compiled by Mary Eggermont (203-346). The book is rounded off with a reference section (347-353), three appendices dealing with aspects of the Piegans' life and language (354-399) and a notes section (401-417). Unfortunately, there are no indexes.

As her diary reveals, Willy Uhlenbeck was an educated woman who had a sincere interest in the Blackfeet and their way of life. Her diary is therefore an excellent source for readers who wish to learn about the daily lives of these Indians. For those involved in the history of linguistics, this edition of Willy's diary and its extensive supplements will without any doubt stimulate interest in a person who was a highly influential and respected Dutch linguist in the first decades of the 20th century,² but whose life and works have only recently become the subject of more detailed investigations. Ovid's maxim *qui bene latuit, bene vixit* (he lives well who hides himself well) is not only an epitaph on Descartes' tombstone, but also a phrase quoted and used by Uhlenbeck. It is hardly surprising, then, that many interesting questions remain to be answered, with regard to such issues as Uhlenbeck's place within general linguistics and his stance *vis à vis* other contemporary linguists.³ In short, I feel that Uhlenbeck's life and works deserve a separate monograph. To that end, the biographical sketch presented here requires some factual corrections and deserves to be greatly expanded. Another valuable addition would be a lengthier and more detailed discussion of Uhlenbeck's linguistic background and his linguistic works.⁴

Finally, for those interested in whodunits, I would like to point out that the author of the well-known Judge Dee Chinese detective novels, Dr Robert van Gulik (1910-1967), received private tuition from Uhlenbeck back when he was a grammar school student in Nijmegen. It was Van Gulik who helped Uhlenbeck finish his Blackfoot grammar and vocabulary (1930-1934). What is more, it has been suggested (cf. Eggermont 2002) that the fictitious character of Dr Djang in Van Gulik's *The Chinese Lake Murders* was in fact modelled on C.C.

² Note that among other things C.C. Uhlenbeck was the chairman of the First International Congress of Linguists (The Hague, 1928). He was of the opinion, however, that as a chairman he had not measured up to his colleagues' expectations (cf. Daalder 2006: 167).

³ Cf. his sentence on Ferdinand de Saussure, written in a letter to his great-nephew E.M. ('Bob') Uhlenbeck on 9 June 1940: 'Saussure was a genius, but hardly oriented outside Indo-Germanic. Therefore, his *Cours de linguistique générale* should not be regarded as a true handbook of general linguistics' (cf. Portielje 2005: 218).

⁴ As it happens, such a monograph, a collection of essays dealing with various aspects of Uhlenbeck's life and linguistic works, is actually being prepared.

Uhlenbeck. All in all, it appears that there is sufficient material to generate yet more fascinating chapters on this Dutch professor and his wife.

References

Daalder, Saskia. 2006. ‘‘Ik voel mij oud en afkeerig van strijd’. Een brief van C.C. Uhlenbeck aan Jos. Schrijnen uit 1929’. *Amicitia in Academia. Composities voor Els Elffers*. Compiled by Jan Noordegraaf, Frank Vonk & Marijke van der Wal. Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU & Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 163-172.

Eggermont-Molenaar, Mary. 2002. ‘Portret van een professor. Een Nijmeegs incident geprojecteerd in een Chinese tempelschool?’. *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XXII, 29-37.

Hinrichs, Jan Paul. 2006. *Nicolaas van Wijk (1880-1941): Slavist, linguist, philanthropist*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.

Koerner, E.F.K. 1977. ‘The Humboldtian trend in linguistics’. *Studies in descriptive and historical linguistics. Festschrift for Winfred Lehmann*. Ed. by Paul J. Hopper et al. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 145-158.

Portielje, Cecile. 2005. ‘Beste Bob. Een taalkundige brief van C.C. Uhlenbeck (1866-1951) aan zijn achterneef E.M. Uhlenbeck (1913-2003)’. *Voortgang, jaarboek voor de neerlandistiek* 23, 209-222.

Swiggers, Pierre. 1987. ‘Theoretical implications of C.C. Uhlenbeck’s Algonquian Studies’. *Papers of the 19th Algonquian Conference*. Ed. by William Cowan. Ottawa: Carleton University, 225-234.